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# Frequently Asked Questions: Carbon Monoxide

**Contact: Environmental Health 321-633-2100 or 321-615-8035**

**Viera, FL — The Florida Department of Health in Brevard County (DOH – Brevard)**

Below are frequently asked questions regarding carbon monoxide and how to stay safe.

## **What is Carbon Monoxide?**

Carbon monoxide (CO) is an invisible, odorless, colorless, and tasteless gas that is highly poisonous. It interferes with the delivery of oxygen in the blood to the rest of the body.

## **What are the major sources of CO?**

Items that use coal, wood, charcoal, natural gas, propane, gasoline, diesel, kerosene, and heating oil for fuel, such as portable generators; small gasoline engines; charcoal grills; gas stoves; portable, fuel-powered space heaters; automobile exhaust from attached garages; and even smoking tobacco produce CO. Problems can arise because of improper placement, installation, operation and maintenance of CO generating devices or appliances.

## **What are the symptoms of CO poisoning?**

Depending on the level of exposure, CO may cause fatigue, weakness, chest pain for those with heart disease, shortness of breath upon exertion, abdominal pain, vomiting, headaches, confusion, lack of coordination, impaired vision, loss of consciousness, and in severe cases death.

## **What should you do if you think you have CO poisoning?**

Do not ignore symptoms, especially if more than one person is feeling ill. Anyone who suspects symptoms of CO poisoning should go outside the home or building immediately and seek prompt medical attention.

If a person has collapsed or is not breathing, call 911 for emergency medical assistance immediately from a safe location such as outside or a neighbor's home. Call the Florida Poison Information Center at 1-800-222-1222 for additional information and advice about CO poisoning.



## What can be done to prevent CO poisoning?

- Ensure all household combustion appliances (fireplaces, stoves, water heaters, and furnaces) are working properly, vented outside with no leaks, and installed per manufacturers' instructions and local building codes.
- Improperly designed or malfunctioning exhaust systems may also contribute to elevated CO levels in homes.
- Opening doors and windows or using fans will not prevent CO build-up to life threatening levels.
- Portable generators and charcoal grills should never be operated inside homes or other enclosed or partially enclosed buildings or outside close to doors, windows, and openings to the house.
- **Do not** use ovens and gas ranges to heat your home.
- **Do not** leave a car or lawn mower engine running in a shed or garage, or in any enclosed or partially enclosed space.
- **Always** install battery-powered or plug-in CO alarms (with battery backup) in your home.

## What about CO alarms?

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends the installation of CO alarms in every home. Install battery-operated CO alarms or plug-in CO alarms with battery backup per manufacturer's installation instructions. The CO alarm should be certified to the requirements of the latest safety standards for CO alarms (UL 2034, IAS 6-96, ASTM D6332, or CSA 6.19.01). Remember to test your CO alarms per the manufacturer recommendations and replace dead batteries.

**Remember:** CO alarms are used as a backup, and not as a replacement, for proper use, placement, and maintenance of your fuel-burning device or appliances. Also, CO alarms are for immediate health issues. Lower level CO exposure below the alarm threshold can still contribute to adverse health effects in susceptible individuals (persons with heart or lung disease for example).

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